

NOTES ON THE BIOLOGY OF
ATHRIPS RANCIDELLA H.-S.
(LEP.: GELECHIIDAE)

By P. A. SOKOLOFF* and J. M. CHALMERS-HUNT**

Athrips rancidella was first described by Herrich-Schaeffer (1854), and first taken in Britain on 7th July 1971, and repeatedly thereafter at light in a garden in West Wickham, Kent – the only known British locality. It was first recorded as new to the British fauna by Chalmers-Hunt (1985), who figured the moth together with the male and female genitalia.

A search for the larva of *rancidella* was made in 1986 and 1987. In May 1987, a heavy infestation was noticed on a specimen of *Cotoneaster horizontalis* in a garden at West Wickham, Kent. Although it was obvious that more than one species of lepidopteron was present, a small, dark gelechiid larva predominated. A number of these were isolated for confirmatory breeding. Final instar larvae were described on 20th June:

Head black; prothoracic plate black with anterior aspect brown; abdomen variable from dark reddish-brown to sooty black; tubercles paler, with a dark central spot, although this feature is poorly differentiated in darker specimens. Very active, living in conspicuous, off-white webbing forming an untidy tube along a twig; loose webbing may extend over leaves, and join adjacent twigs. The larva eats the undersurface of a leaf, leaving a transparent film of leaf tissue which turns slightly brown and withers, disfiguring the appearance of the bush. Pupation occurs in a dense, white cocoon in the larval habitation, usually along a twig.

Moths emerged over the period 25th June to 16th July. They exhibited typical gelechiid behaviour, being active when disturbed, running rapidly around, taking flight, or hurling themselves into dark recesses. It has not been established if the moth overwinters as an adult, egg or larva. Captive moths sleeved on foodplant died after about a week, showing no signs of seeking a resting place, and it may reasonably be assumed that the overwintering stage is the egg or as a small larva.

From a comparatively small sample of infested *Cotoneaster*, many tens of moths emerged, with no obvious parasites noted. Small numbers of other species were also bred, these being *Scythropia crataegella* L., *Ancylis achatana* D. & S. and three species not previously recorded from *Cotoneaster*, namely *Clepsis consimilana* Hb., *Acleris variegana* D. & S. and *Teleiodes vulgella* Hb.

* 4 Steep Close, Orpington, Kent.

** 1 Hardcourts Close, West Wickham, Kent.

References

- Chalmers-Hunt, J. M., (1985) *Monochroa niphognatha* Goz. and *Athrips rancidella* H.S. (Lep.: Gelechiidae) new to the British fauna. *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* **97**: 20-24.
- Herrich-Schaeffer, G. A. W. (1843-56) *Systematische Bearbeitung der Schmetterling von Europa* **5**: 176.

LACON AT LARGE. — On a visit to Windsor Great Park on 16.5.87, I found myself by chance near the site at which *Cicones undatus* Guer. was first noted in Britain (*Ent. Rec.* **99**: 93) and took the opportunity to check on its fortunes. I found it sparingly on three dead sycamore trees and was somewhat surprised to find with it on the third tree a specimen of *C. variegata* (Hellwig), a beetle usually found on beech trees. I was even more surprised to find, on the same tree under a small flake of bark, a live female *Lacon querceus* Herbst.

This is a beetle which has been found by a number of coleopterists at Windsor since it was rediscovered there by my friend Mr. A. A. Allen in 1937 after a lapse of more than a hundred years but, as far as I can determine, it has been found exclusively where it has bred in red rotten oak in standing or fallen trees or in fairly large fallen boughs. Indeed, Mr. Allen, who has probably come across it at Windsor more frequently than anyone else, was led to state (1966, *Ent. Rec.* **78**: 14) “. . . probably nocturnal, as it is never found at large.” It is perhaps debatable whether a beetle hiding under a small flake of sycamore bark was truly “at large” but at least it was not in its usual habitat.

From my own limited observations it appears that once a bough containing a breeding colony of *Lacon* becomes detached from its tree and falls to the ground, the colony does not thrive for long, for reasons yet to be determined. Perhaps this is the time, possibly the only time, when adults disperse to found new colonies. My friend Mr. H. Mendel has told me that he with others found a number of *Lacon* adults in a large piece of fallen oak in Windsor Great Park about six weeks prior to my visit and it could be relevant that this was only a few 100 m from where I found the specimen under sycamore bark, presumably hiding temporarily while she sought an appropriate breeding site.

I thank Mr. A. R. Wiseman (Deputy Ranger, Crown Estates) for permission to study beetles at Windsor and Mrs. S. Garnett, Nature Conservancy Council for arranging the permit. — J. A. OWEN, 8 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3PU.